

Plan eliminates northern Monroe district

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Katz, Jones lose committee fight to preserve district

By Greg Hilburn

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Two amendments that would have preserved a northern Monroe-based district in the Louisiana House of Representatives were rejected Wednesday by the committee crafting the new map.

State Reps. Kay Katz, R-Monroe, who serves in the existing northern Monroe-based District 16, and Rosalind Jones, D-Monroe, who now



Katz

serves in the existing southern Monroe-based District 17, joined forces in the failed attempt to adjust the proposed map in the House and Governmental Affairs Committee.

"I'm very disappointed," said Katz, who is term-limited and can't run again in the House. "I told the committee that many of them were looking at

(district) lines and thinking about reelection, but that's not why I'm here. I'm fighting for my community.

"Rep. Jones and I fought valiantly and will continue to fight. Monroe doesn't deserve this."

Under state House Speaker Jim Tucker's proposed plan, most of northern Monroe would be folded into Jones' District 17. District 16 would become a new minority district that includes Bastrop and eastern Monroe, including the University of Louisiana at Monroe.

Mayor Jamie Mayo supports preserving the northern Monroe district, saying, "The existing representation has served the city well."

Monroe Chamber of Commerce President Sue Nicholson said the new

lines "would break up the cohesiveness of the core of the business community, and we're very concerned about it."

Katz said she would continue to try to have the map amended, perhaps on the House floor, but she admitted success at that point is unlikely.

Monroe hotel developer James Moore, who has close ties to Gov. Bobby Jindal, said he will try to convince the governor to intervene.

"I'm also encouraging business leaders to let their voices be heard with the legislators and let them know we need to keep the district intact," Moore said. "I know it will be tough. Everybody is covering their bases, and because Kay is term-limited her leverage is reduced."

Two Monroe men, Michael Echols and Jay Morris, have already announced their candidacy for Katz's seat, but under the new map they would find themselves running against the incumbent Jones in District 17.

They could choose to run in a different district, but would have to move their residence into that district following the election.

Echols said he plans to continue his candidacy regardless of the new map lines.

"I want to represent northeastern Louisiana," he said. "We'll have to set a strategy once the new lines are finalized."

Morris didn't return a call from *The News-Star* Wednesday.